

Presidio of San Francisco, Flammable Storage
Building Submarine Mine Depot
(Building 990)
Long Avenue , Fort Point Vicinity
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2638

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6 August 1996

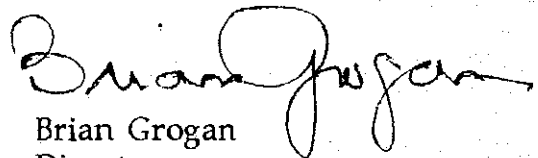
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Brian Grogan
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO,
FLAMMABLE STORAGE BUILDING SUBMARINE MINE DEPOT
(Building 990)

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Location:

Building 990 is located adjacent to the Torpedo Wharf, 2,000 feet southeast of Fort Point, on the north shoreline of the Presidio of San Francisco, in the City and County of San Francisco, California.

U.S.G.S. San Francisco North Quadrangle (7.5), Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10. 546 690. 4184 520

Significance:

Building 990 is a small concrete building built in 1948 as storage for flammable materials for the Mine Depot. The Mine Depot was first built in 1908 with a torpedo wharf submarine mine-loading depot, and with its complex of five related buildings. It illustrates this aspect of seacoast defense in the Presidio from the early-to-mid-20th century. Building 990 is the most recently built structure of the group. It is a contributing structure to the Presidio of San Francisco's National Historic Landmark district.

Description:

Building 990 is located about 25 feet west of the Torpedo Wharf, and is situated nearly adjacent to, and at a slight angle to, the sea wall. The rear of the building and the sea wall are a few inches apart. The sea wall rises about two feet above grade here, and on the other side of it are boulders and a sandy beach. To the south are buildings 985 and 986, identical corrugated iron mine-loading houses that are important elements of the Mine Depot. Just south of these is the road to Fort Point, and still farther south is the hillside on which Battery East sits. The area is frequented by joggers and visitors to Fort Point. To the north and west, the Marin Headlands and the Golden Gate Bridge are prominently visible.

Building 990 is a rectangular one-story building measuring 10 feet in width, 18 feet in depth, and 10 feet in height. All four walls are concrete, and the building rests on a concrete slab foundation. The flat roof is also concrete and overhangs the walls by about three inches on all sides.

The only entrance into the building is a metal plate door in its east side. This door is 7 feet tall and 3 feet wide, and is sturdily fastened by heavy metal hinges extending across most of the width of the door. Numerous rivets in the door indicate bracing on the inside. Since the door is not flush with the wall, a sheet metal eave was placed over the doorway to prevent rainwater from seeping in.

The only other openings in the building are a window in the west wall which has been boarded up, two screened vents in the bottom of the south wall, and a round metal ventilator on the roof.

The interior was not accessible for viewing for this report.

Historical Context:

A wharf and a cluster of buildings were first developed at this site during the 1850s, as a result of the construction of Fort Point 2,000 feet to the northwest. In order to facilitate construction of the fort, a wharf was built here in June 1854, and a mortar mill, a cement warehouse, and cranes were built here the following year. Development of the area continued after the fort was completed. Two barracks and four mess halls were built 300 feet southeast of the wharf in 1865. In 1868, the construction of Battery East on the bluffs behind the wharf stimulated the rebuilding of the wharf and the addition to the complex of storehouses, a mortar mill, a carpenter shop, and a blacksmith shop. A map dated 1879 shows a commissary storehouse, a coal shed, a bakery, several construction shops and a lighthouse storeroom clustered at the foot of the wharf, with the barracks (now storehouses) and mess halls (now laundresses' quarters) of 1865 located to the southeast. Overlooking the entire area were the Commanding

Officers' Quarters halfway up the hill, and Battery East at the top of the bluffs.¹

Except for Battery East, none of this complex of 19th-century structures survives. The complex was replaced in 1907-1909 by a new torpedo wharf and group of buildings, the current Mine Depot complex.

The Torpedo Wharf, part of the "submarine mine depot," was used in the process of planting underwater mines for harbor defense. At the turn of the century a "torpedo" still meant an underwater explosive mine, and such mines were stored and occasionally used in San Francisco Bay from 1883 through World War II.²

A concrete mine depot and storehouse were built on Yerba Buena Island in 1889, and this is where tugboats and lighters put in to load torpedoes (as underwater mines were first called), first used for the defensive mining of San Francisco Bay during the Spanish-American War. In March 1903, the responsibility for mine laying was transferred from the Corps of Engineers to the Coast Artillery Corps, and the latter preferred a depot site closer to the Golden Gate. The current Mine Depot site in the Presidio of San Francisco was chosen, and in 1907-1908 a new torpedo wharf was built where earlier wharves had been built in 1854 and 1868.³

Several buildings were built at the foot of the wharf, including the mine loading houses 985 and 986 (1908); a warehouse, building 983 (1908); and a mine storehouse, Building 979 (uncertain date), all extant.⁴

The Mine Depot was only part of a system of buildings which related to the operation of these mines, and the mines were only one part of the Coast Defense system, which was based on heavy artillery, and, later, aircraft. "Casemates," which sent the electronic signals to

detonate the mines, were built at Fort Barry in 1908, Fort Baker in 1909, and Baker Beach in the Presidio in 1912.⁶

Regarding the Mine Depot in the Presidio, military historian Gordon Chappell has written, "although poorly located and designed, this depot nevertheless served through World Wars I and II and most of its buildings still stand." The wharf itself was rebuilt in 1941, but was partially superseded by a new depot built at Fort Baker, in Marin County, starting in 1937.⁷

Building 990 was built as a flammable storage facility for the Torpedo Wharf in 1948,⁸ only two years before the Coast Artillery Corps was disbanded due to its obsolescence in the age of air power.⁹ The use of underwater mines transferred to the Navy.

Endnotes:

1. Erwin N. Thompson, *Defender of the Gate: The Presidio of San Francisco, A History 1846-1994*, Draft Historic Resources Study (San Francisco: 1994), 45-46, 50, 53; map: "Fort Point, 1879."
2. Gordon Chappell, "Forts Under the Sea: Submarine Mine Defense of San Francisco Bay" (National Park Service: n. p. [San Francisco], n. d. [ca. 1981]). One of a series of essays on San Francisco Bay fortifications.
3. Chappell, "Forts Under the Sea." Thompson, *Defender*, 265.
4. Paul Alley, Leo R. Barker, et al., "Presidio of San Francisco, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form" (National Park Service: San Francisco, 1993), Section 7, p. 79.
5. Chappell, "Forts Under the Sea."
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Building Records: ADPWEMR-5, Box 5, at the Army Records Center, Presidio of San Francisco. Cost of construction of Building 990 was \$2880.

9. Chappell, "Forts Under the Sea."

Sources:

Alley, Paul, Leo R. Barker, et al., "Presidio of San Francisco, National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms" (National Park Service: San Francisco, 1993).

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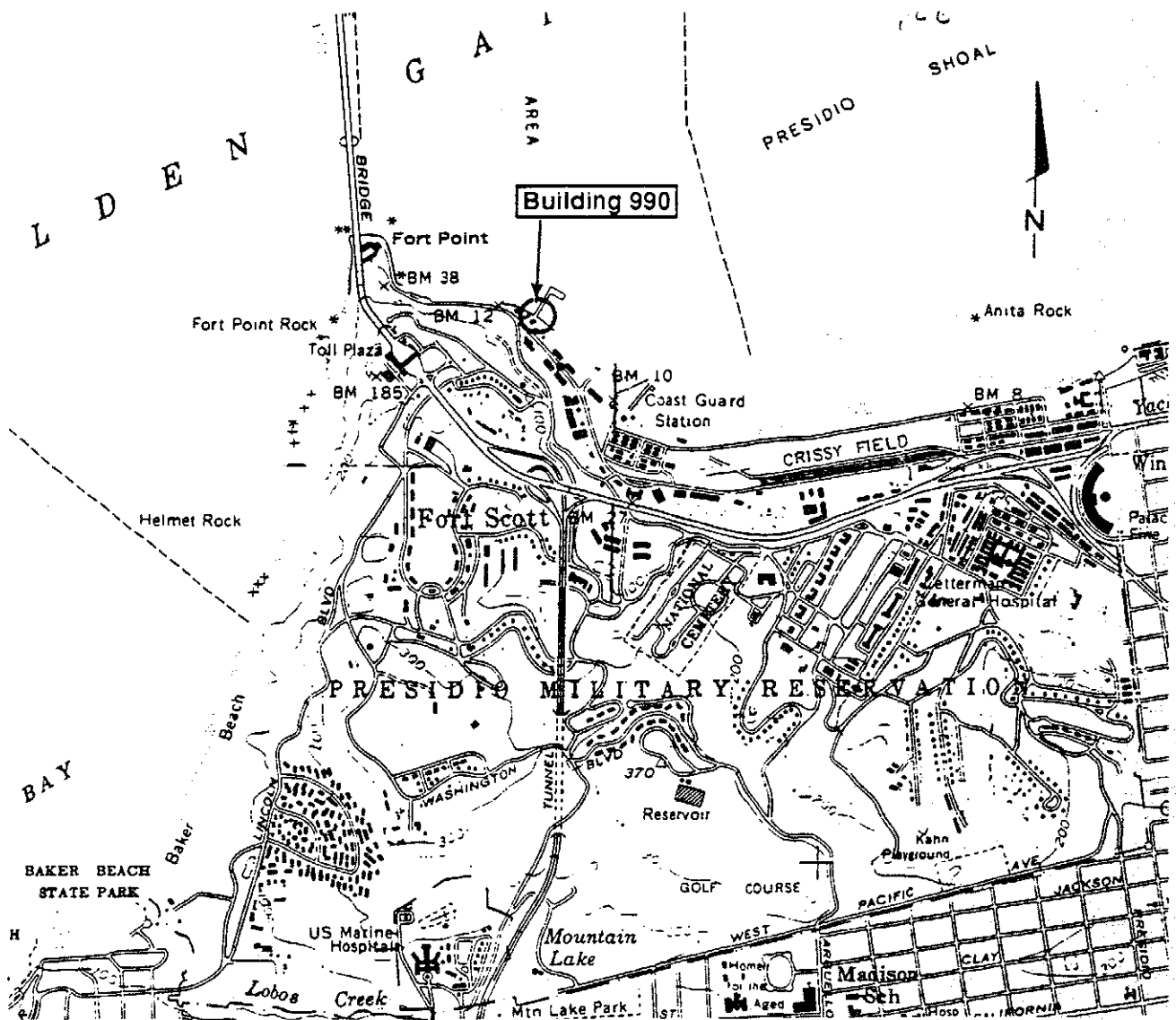
Chappell, Gordon, "Forts Under the Sea: Submarine Mine Defense of San Francisco Bay" (National Park Service: n. p. [San Francisco], n. d. [ca. 1981]). One of a series of short essays on San Francisco Bay fortifications.

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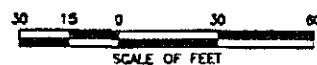
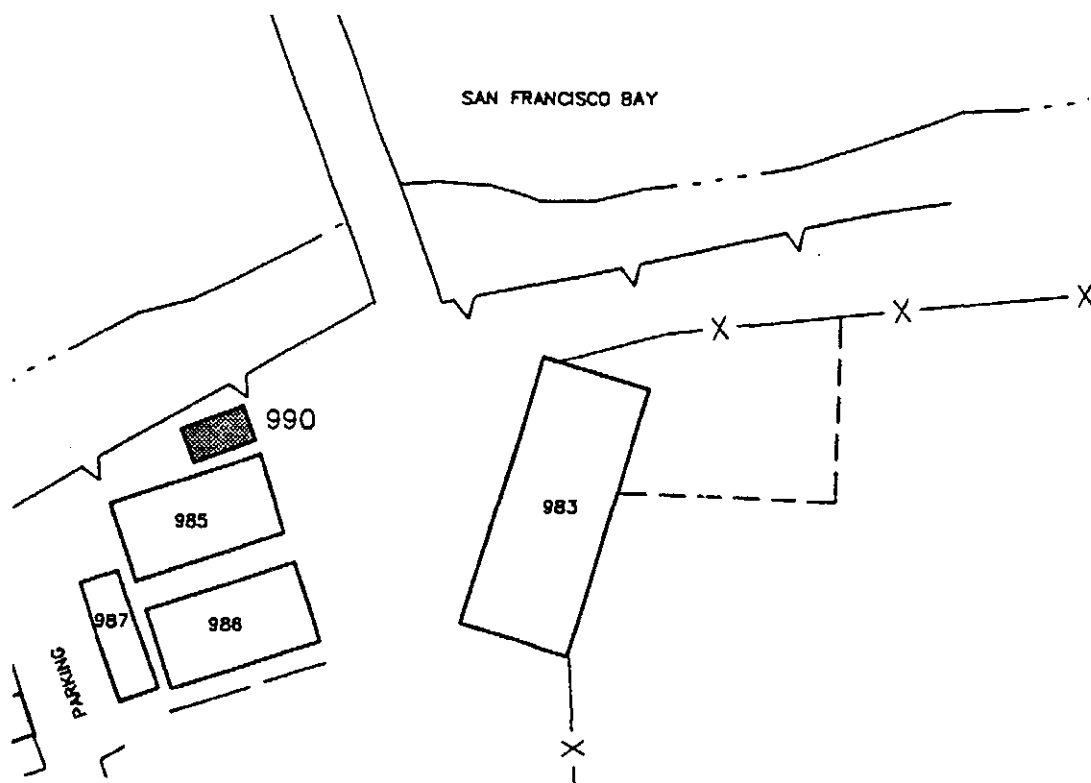
Project Information:

Building 990 is part of the Golden Gate/Fort Point Planning Area, as identified in the *Final General Management Plan Amendment* (FGMPA) (July 1994). The demolition of Building 990 is in accordance with the preferred alternative identified for the Golden Gate/Fort Point Planning Area in the *FGMPA Environmental Impact Statement* (July 1994). The Programmatic Agreement for the FGMPA Environmental Impact Statement stipulates Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation as a mitigation measure for the adverse effects resulting from the demolition of Buildings 901-919. This report is part of the HABS documentation and was prepared by William Kostura, architectural historian, Dames & Moore, San Francisco, in May 1995.

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